

# *Longfellow's Life & Legacy*

Longfellow House- Washington's Headquarters  
National Historic Site  
105 Brattle Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138 [www.nps.gov/long](http://www.nps.gov/long)

## Poems and Primary Sources

## The Children's Hour, 1859

Between the dark and the daylight,  
When the night is beginning to lower,  
Comes a pause in the day's  
occupations,  
That is known as the Children's  
Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me  
The patter of little feet,  
The sound of a door that is opened,  
And voices soft and sweet.

From my study I see in the lamplight,  
Descending the broad hall stair,  
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,  
And Edith with golden hair.

A whisper, and then a silence:  
Yet I know by their merry eyes  
They are plotting and planning  
together  
To take me by surprise.

A sudden rush from the stairway,  
A sudden raid from the hall!  
By three doors left unguarded  
They enter my castle wall!

They climb up into my turret  
O'er the arms and back of my chair;  
If I try to escape, they surround me;  
They seem to be everywhere.

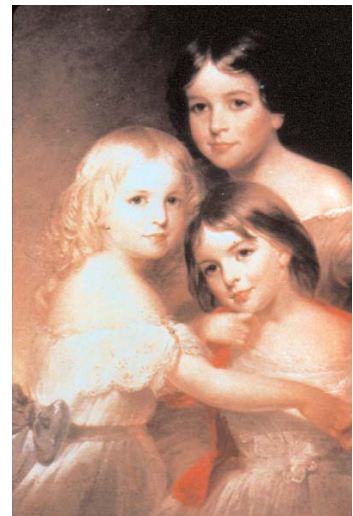
They almost devour me with kisses,  
Their arms about me entwine,  
Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen  
In his Mouse- Tower on the Rhine!

Do you think, O blue- eyed banditti,  
Because you have scaled the wall,  
Such an old mustache as I am  
Is not a match for you all!

I have you fast in my fortress,  
And will not let you depart,  
But put you down into the dungeon  
In the round- tower of my heart.

And there will I keep you forever,  
Yes, forever and a day,  
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,  
And moulder in dust away!

Thomas B.  
Read, 1859



## Alice, Annie Allegra, and Edith

Henry and Fanny had four daughters. Fanny, the first born daughter, died when she was fifteen months old. Alice, Edith and Annie were a great source of inspiration to Mr. Longfellow. He wrote a poem called “The Children’s Hour” about the three girls.

*“It is Sunday afternoon. You know, then, how the old house looks, - the shadow in the library, and the sunshine in the study, where I stand at my desk and write you this. Two little girls are playing about the room, - Alice counting with great noise the brass handles on my secretary, ‘nine, eight, five, one,’ Edith insisting upon having some paper box, long promised but never found, and informing me I am not a man of my word!”*

Henry Longfellow, January 30, 1859  
(from a note to a friend)



Edith and Annie  
Longfellow, 1859



Alice Longfellow, 1859

*“Alice has just had her seventh birthday and is the best and brightest of little girls, a great pet of her papa’s. Edi, though lovely as an angel, is rather obstinate and wilful [sic], but so carressing and sweet all are drawn to her, and Annie is the sweetest little thing you ever saw. I carry her round the library and ask her the names of the busts. She says, Homer, Sophocles, etc. with amusing correctness, and is very eager to learn.”*

Fanny Longfellow, September 29, 1857  
(from her journal)

## *from* To a Child, 1845

*Written for Charley Longfellow.*

...Through these once solitary halls  
Thy pattering footstep falls.  
The sound of thy merry voice  
Makes the old walls  
Jubilant, and they rejoice  
With the joy of thy young heart,  
O'er the light of whose gladness  
No shadows of sadness  
From the somber background of memory start.

Once, ah, once, within these walls,  
One whom memory oft recalls,  
The Father of his Country, dwelt.

And yonder meadows broad and damp  
The fires of the besieging camp  
Encircled with a burning belt.  
Up and down these echoing stairs,  
Heavy with the weight of cares,  
Sounded his majestic tread;  
Yes, within this very room  
Sat he in those hours of gloom,  
Weary both in heart and head...

## The Castle-Builder, 1848

*Written for Erny Longfellow.*

A gentle boy, with soft and silken locks,  
A dreamy boy, with brown and tender eyes,  
A castle-builder, with his wooden blocks,  
And towers that touch imaginary skies.

A fearless rider on his father's knee,  
An eager listener unto stories told  
At the Round Table of the nursery,  
Of heroes and adventures manifold.

There will be other towers for thee to build;  
There will be other steeds for thee to ride;  
There will be other legends, and all filled  
With greater marvels and more glorified.

Build on, and make thy castles high and fair,  
Rising and reaching upward to the skies;  
Listen to voices in the upper air,  
Nor lose thy simple faith in mysteries

## Charles and Ernest Longfellow

Charley and Erny were the Longfellow's two oldest children. In a journal entry from 1848, Fanny Longfellow wrote "*Erny promises to be the poet, Charley the man of action.*" Erny did, in fact, pursue a career in the arts; he grew up to be a painter. As for Charley, he ran away to be a soldier in the Civil War and later became a world traveler.



Charles and Ernest Longfellow, c. 1849



Henry, Charley, Erny, & Fanny Longfellow, 1849

*"Nursery floor covered with architectural [sic] elevations. Charley can construct great steps very accurately. Erny takes a little book, & reads scraps of lines he remembers. "Bon Jour mama"! he said Friday. Very riotous both at dinner, overflowing with fun."*

Fanny Longfellow, 1849 (from her journal)

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Fanny Longfellow, 1849 (from her journal)

## Drawings and Paintings by the Longfellow Children

Henry and Fanny Longfellow believed artistic expression to be an essential part of being human, and art to be one of the most important ways that people communicate. They strongly supported and encouraged their children's artistic expression.



Watercolor painting of the house. Erny Longfellow, 1858. Age 13.



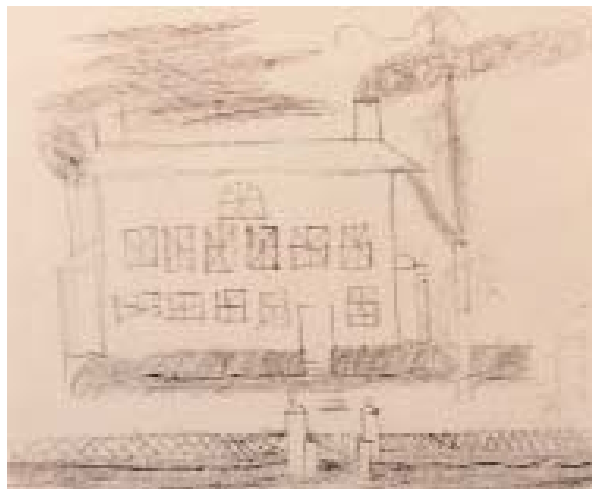
Pencil drawing of view from the front door of Craigie House. Edith Longfellow, 1859. Age 6.



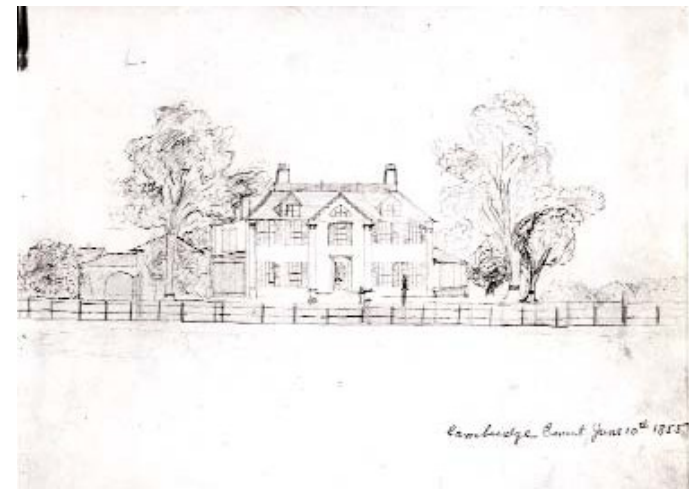
Watercolor painting of lilacs in laundry yard. Edith Longfellow, 1860. Age 7.



Pencil drawing of the view to the Charles River from the house. Erny Longfellow, 1855. Age 10.



Pencil drawing of the house. Charley Longfellow. Age unknown.



Pencil drawing of the house. Erny Longfellow, 1855. Age 10.



## The Village Blacksmith, 1839

*On his daily walk down Brattle Street, Henry Longfellow would pass by the shop of the village blacksmith, Dexter Pratt.*

Under a spreading chestnut tree  
The village smithy stands;  
The smith, a mighty man is he,  
With large and sinewy hands;  
And the muscles of his brawny arms  
Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,  
His face is like the tan;  
His brow is wet with honest sweat,  
He earns whate'er he can,  
And looks the whole world in the face,  
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,  
You can hear his bellows blow;  
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,  
With measured beat and slow,  
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,  
When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school  
Look in the open door;  
They love to see the flaming forge,  
And hear the bellows roar.  
And catch the burning sparks that fly  
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church  
And sits among his boys;  
He hears the parson pray and preach,  
He hears his daughter's voice,  
Singing in the village choir,  
And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,  
Singing in Paradise!  
He needs must think of her once more,  
How in the grave she lies;  
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes  
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling, - rejoicing, - sorrowing,  
Onward through life he goes;  
Each morning sees some task begin,  
Each evening sees it close;  
Something attempted, something done,  
Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,  
For the lesson thou has taught!  
Thus at the flaming forge of life  
Our fortunes must be wrought;  
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped  
Each burning deed and thought.



*The Village Blacksmith*, illustrated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1840

## From my Arm-Chair, 1879

*“To the Children of Cambridge*

*Who presented to me, on my seventy- second birthday, February 27, 1879, this chair made from the wood of the village blacksmith’s chestnut tree.”*

Am I a king, that I should call my own  
This splendid ebon throne?  
Or by what reason, or what right divine,  
Can I proclaim it mine?

Only, perhaps, by right divine of song  
It may to me belong;  
Only because the spreading chestnut tree  
Of old was sung by me.

Well I remember it in all its prime,  
When in the summer- time  
The affluent foliage of its branches made  
A cavern of cool shade.

There, by the blacksmith's forge, beside the  
street,  
Its blossoms white and sweet  
Enticed the bees, until it seemed alive,  
And murmured like a hive.

And when the winds of autumn, with a  
shout,  
Tossed its great arms about,  
The shining chestnuts, bursting from the  
sheath,  
Dropped to the ground beneath.

And now some fragments of its branches  
bare,  
Shaped as a stately chair,  
Have by my hearthstone found a home at  
last,  
And whisper of the past.

The Danish king could not in all his pride  
Repel the ocean tide,  
But, seated in this chair, I can rhyme  
Roll back the tide of Time.

I see again, as one in vision sees,  
The blossoms and the bees,  
And hear the children's voices shout and  
call,  
And the brown chestnuts fall.

I see the smithy with its fires aglow,  
I hear the bellows blow,  
And the shrill hammers on the anvil beat  
The iron white with heat!

And thus, dear children, have ye made for  
me  
This day a jubilee,  
And to my more than threescore years and  
ten  
Brought back my youth again.

The heart hath its own memory, like the  
mind,  
And in it are enshrined  
The precious keepsakes, into which is  
wrought  
The giver's loving thought.

Only your love and your remembrance  
could  
Give life to this dead wood,  
And make these branches, leafless now so  
long,  
Blossom again in song.

*“Professor Longfellow’s Birthday”*

*“...it occupies a place of honor at the poet’s fireside...The upholstering of the arms and the cushion are in green leather. The castors are glass balls set in sockets...”*

newspaper clipping from “Craigie House”  
booklet, 1879



## Travels by the Fireside, 1874

The ceaseless rain is falling fast,  
And yonder gilded vane,  
Immovable for three days past,  
Points to the misty main.

It drives me in upon myself  
And to the fireside gleams,  
To pleasant books that crowd my  
shelf,  
And still more pleasant dreams.

I read whatever bards have sung  
Of lands beyond the sea,  
And the bright days when I was young  
Come thronging back to me.

In fancy I can hear again  
The Alpine torrent's roar,  
The mule-bells on the hills of Spain,  
The sea at Elsinore.

I see the convent's gleaming wall  
Rise from its groves of pine,  
And towers of old cathedrals tall,  
And castles by the Rhine.

I journey on by park and spire,  
Beneath centennial trees,  
Through fields with poppies all on  
fire,  
And gleams of distant seas.

I fear no more the dust and heat,  
No more I feel fatigue,  
While journeying with another's feet  
O'er many a lengthening league.

Let others traverse sea and land,  
And toil through various climes,  
I turn the world round with my hand  
Reading these poets' rhymes.

From them I learn whatever lies  
Beneath each changing zone,  
And see, when looking with their eyes,  
Better than with mine own.



Henry Longfellow in Study,  
c. 1872 - 74

## The Slave in the Dismal Swamp, 1842

*Longfellow felt very strongly that slavery should be abolished. He published a small book of poems about the evils of slavery in 1842, long before the Civil War. This poem is one of eight from that collection.*

In dark fens of the Dismal Swamp  
The hunted Negro lay;  
He saw the fire of the midnight camp,  
And heard at times a horse's tramp,  
And a bloodhound's distant bay.

Where the will- o' - the wisps and glowworms shine,  
In bulrush and in brake;  
Where the waving mosses shroud the pine,  
And the cedar grows, and the poisonous vine  
Is spotted like the snake;

Where hardly a human foot could pass,  
Or a human heart would dare,  
On the quaking turf of the green morass  
He crouched in the rank and tangled grass,  
Like a wild beast in his lair.

A poor old slave, infirm and lame;  
Great scars deformed his face;  
On his forehead he bore the brand of shame,  
And the rags, that hid his mangled frame,  
Were the livery of disgrace.

All things above were bright and fair;  
All things were glad and free;  
Lithe squirrels darted here and there,  
And wild birds filled the echoing air  
With songs of liberty!

On him alone was the doom of pain,  
From the morning of his birth;  
On him alone the curse of Cain  
Fell, like a flail on the garnered grain,  
And struck him to the earth!



Portrait of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, by Lawrence, 1854.  
Drawn after Longfellow heard about the Fugitive Slave Law (1850).

*“If anybody wants to break a law, let him  
break the Fugitive Slave Law.*

*That is all it is for.”*

H. W. Longfellow, May 1858



## Haunted Houses, 1852

All houses wherein men have lived and died  
Are haunted houses. Through the open doors  
The harmless phantoms on their errands glide,  
With feet that make no sound upon the floors.

We meet them at the doorway, on the stair,  
Along the passages they come and go,  
Impalpable impressions on the air,  
A sense of something moving to and fro.

There are more ghosts at the table than the  
hosts  
Invited; the illuminated hall  
Is thronged with quiet, inoffensive ghosts,  
As silent as the pictures on the walls.

The stranger at my fireside cannot see  
The forms I see, nor hear the sounds I hear;  
He but perceives what is; while unto me  
All that has been is visible and clear.

We have not title- deeds to house or lands;  
Owners and occupants of earlier dates  
From graves forgotten stretch their dusty  
hands,  
And hold in mortmain still their old estates.

The spirit- world around this world of sense  
Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere  
Wafts through these earthly mists and vapors  
dense  
A vital breath of more ethereal air.

Our little lives are kept in equipoise  
By opposite attractions and desires;  
The struggle of the instinct that enjoys,  
And the more noble instinct that aspires.

These perturbations, this perpetual jar  
Of earthly wants and aspirations high,  
Come from the influence of an unseen star,  
An undiscovered planet in our sky.

And as the moon from some dark gate of cloud  
Throws o'er the sea a floating bridge of light,  
Across whose trembling planks our fancies crowd  
Into the realm of mystery and night, -

So from the world of spirits there descends  
A bridge of light, connecting it with this,  
O'er whose unsteady floor, that sways and bends,  
Wander our thoughts above the dark abyss.



## The Builders, 1846

All are architects of Fate,  
Working in these walls of Time;  
Some with massive deeds and great,  
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low;  
Each thing in its place is best;  
And what seems but idle show  
Strengthens and supports the rest.

For the structure that we raise,  
Time is with materials filled;  
Our to- days and yesterdays  
Are the blocks with which we build.

Truly shape and fashion these;  
Leave no yawning gaps between;  
Think not, because no man sees,  
Such things will remain unseen.

In the elder days of Art,  
Builders wrought with greatest care  
Each minute and unseen part;  
For the Gods see everywhere.

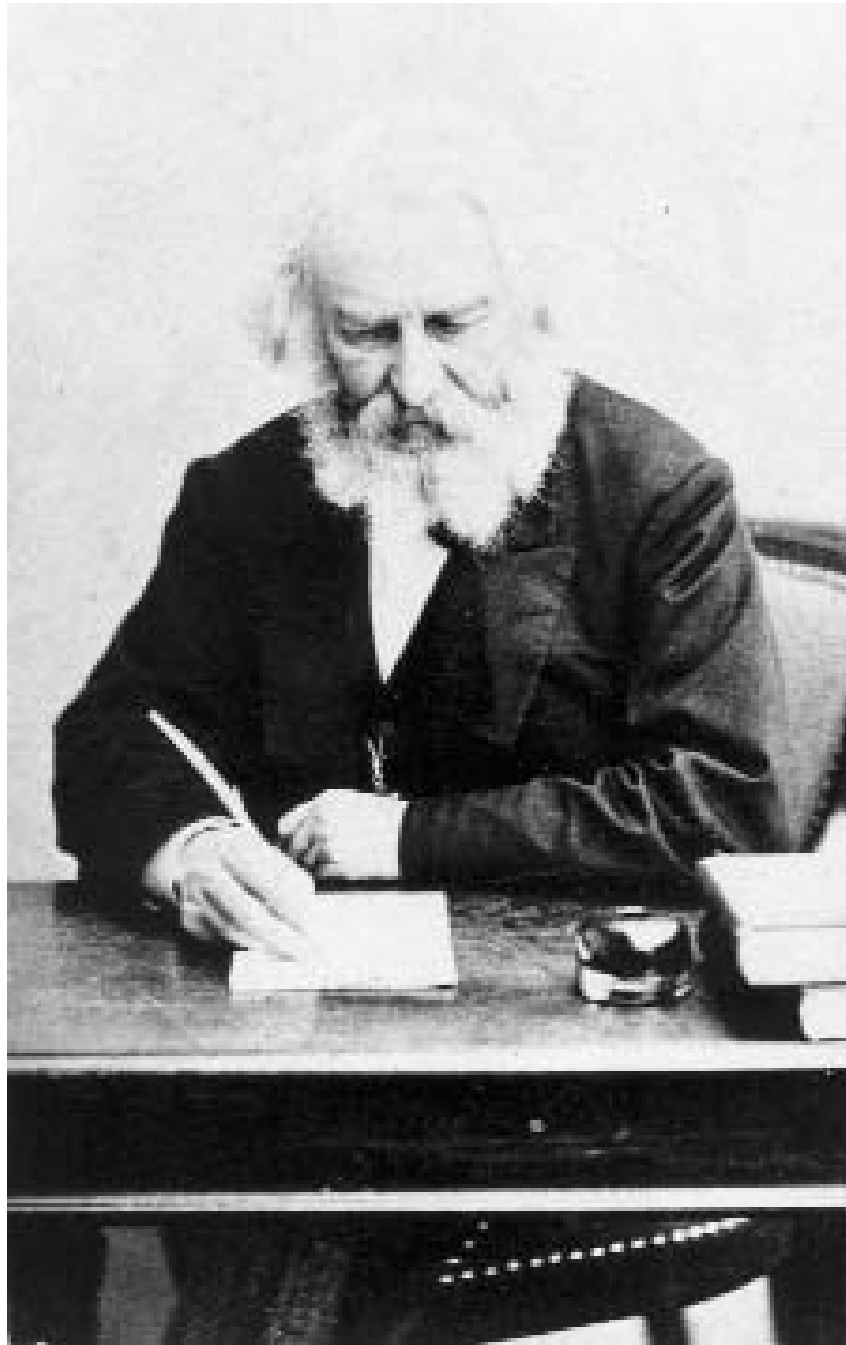
Let us do our work as well,  
Both the unseen and the seen;  
Make the house, where Gods may  
dwell,  
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

Else our lives are incomplete,  
Standing in these walls of Time,  
Broken stairways, where the feet  
Stumble as they seek to climb.

Build to- day, then, strong and sure,  
With a firm and ample base;  
And ascending and secure  
Shall to- morrow find its place.

Thus alone can we attain  
To those turrets, where the eye  
Sees the world as one vast plain,  
And one boundless reach of sky.

*“Our to- days and yesterdays  
Are the blocks with which we build...”*  
The Builders, 1846



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, c. 1870 - 76

## Charles Sumner, 1874

*A poem written for Charles Sumner and read at his funeral in 1874.*

Garlands upon his grave,  
And flowers upon his hearse,  
And to the tender heart and brave  
The tribute of this verse.

His was the troubled life,  
The conflict and the pain,  
The grief, the bitterness of strife,  
The honor without stain.

Like Winkelried, he took  
Into his manly breast  
The sheaf of hostile spears, and  
broke  
A path for the oppressed.

Then from the fatal field  
Upon a nation's heart  
Borne like a warrior on his shield!—  
So should the brave depart.

Death takes us by surprise,  
And stays our hurrying feet;  
The great design unfinished lies,  
Our lives are incomplete.

But in the dark unknown  
Perfect their circles seem,  
Even as a bridge's arch of stone  
Is rounded in the stream.

Alike are life and death,  
When life in death survives,  
And the uninterrupted breath  
Inspires a thousand lives.

Were a star quenched on high,  
For ages would its light,  
Still travelling downward from the  
sky,  
Shine on our mortal sight.

So when a great man dies,  
For years beyond our ken,  
The light he leaves behind him lies  
Upon the paths of men.

## Charles Sumner

The friendship between Charles Sumner and Henry Longfellow lasted from the time they met as young professors at Harvard in 1837 until Sumner's death in 1874. Sumner is best known as an anti-slavery activist and a Senator from Massachusetts.

*"...he stands six feet, two, in his stockings. A colossus holding his burning heart in his hand, to light up the sea of Life...He is a very lovely character...full of talent with a most keen enjoyment of life; simple, energetic, hearty, good with a great deal of poetry and no nonsense in him."*

Henry Longfellow, 1838 (from a letter to George Washington Greene)

*"Longfellow's reputation is rising, rising, soon I prophecy to illumine the whole horizon."*

Charles Sumner, 1842

*"Sumner...in fact breathes in quite another atmosphere."*

Henry Longfellow, 1846



Charles Sumner and Henry Longfellow,  
December 1863